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# Katharsis, Flower and Darkness in Greek Drama, Noh and Butoh

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## Aristotle's Intention: *Katharsis* (purification)

Perhaps no other theoretical work has defined a tradition so thoroughly as Aristotle's (384-322 BC) *Poetics*. Whether any subsequent theory supports or rejects Aristotle's ideas, nearly every one is forced to adopt the vocabulary of Aristotle's treatment of the subject: plot, character, metaphor and so on. It is as if the Western mind is incapable of thinking outside Aristotle's categories even if it wants to. At the same time, it must be said that the mainstream of Western literary criticism fails to grasp important intentions of Aristotle's theory.

For example, traditional interpretations of the *Poetics* take the central theme to be an explanation of how to construct a good plot. Consequently, it diminishes the creative inspiration of the playwright and actors, on the one hand, and the experience of the audience on the other. This view is understandable since the construction of plots takes up so many pages in the *Poetics*, and plot is explicitly estimated to be more important than the other elements of drama. However, Aristotle is one of the great systematic thinkers of the Western tradition. His goal is to weave a great tapestry of scientific thinking, where any part of the tapestry is composed of threads that lead to other parts of the overall picture.

Following the threads of Aristotle's treatment of literature is complicated by the fact that none of his published works (probably dramatic dialogues like Plato's) survive. The thirty books (nearly 2000 pages) that we have seem to be lecture notes that were kept secret within his school after his death, because he had fallen out of favor with the political authorities at Athens due to his Macedonian connections. The division and arrangement of the books were likely done by Andronicus of Rhodes (fl. c. 70 BC), the eleventh and last principal (*sholarch*) of Aristotle's school, nearly 250 years after Aristotle's death.

Despite these difficulties in viewing a complete image of Aristotle's ideas about literature, certain lines of thought are evident. The Greek word that Aristotle uses to discuss the actor (*prattetai*) of a drama is character (*ethos*), and this has an obvious connection with moral behavior and education. Aristotle's educational program is treated at the end of the *Politics* and covers primary and secondary school education, with subjects such as: (1) reading, (2) writing, (3) gymnastic and (4) music. The discussion in the *Politics* mainly concerns lyric music, but the wider sense of the Greek word „*mousike*“ applies to anything inspired by the Muses. Thus, the *Poetics* may be seen as a continuation of this curriculum that treats advanced musical education:

tragedy, comedy and epic. Besides character, actors are motivated by thought (*dianoia*); an understanding of this human faculty leads to a reading of Aristotle's psychology. Finally, the aim of a dramatic performance is to produce a certain emotional experience. In the *Poetics*, only pity and fear are treated, so for a full discussion of human emotions, we must turn to the *Rhetoric*, where manipulation of emotions is an important element of an orator's skill.

In light of these other texts, a different picture of Aristotle's idea emerges. Rather than constructing a logical storyline, the center of attention shifts to the production of a specific emotional effect in the audience. At *Politics* 1339a17-26, he mentions three effects: (1) entertainment (*paidias* and *anapauseôs*), (2) moral education (*aretên* and *êthos*) and (3) mental cultivation (*diagôgên*). A few lines later, mental cultivation is replaced by *katharsis* (*katharseôs*) (*Politics* 1341b35). In the intervening passage, he mentions the Pythagorean and Platonic views that the harmonies of music either directly or indirectly „tune“ the chords of the soul.

A tragedy is defined as an arrangement of actions, actors and musical language that arouse „pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its *katharsis* of such emotions. (*Poetics* 1449b24)“ Aristotle explains that „pity“ (*eleos*) and „fear“ (*phobos*) are really two sides of the same coin: one pities in another what one fears for oneself (*Rhetoric* 1386a26-27). It is not that the audience thinks the specific catastrophe acted on the stage might befall any of them: killing one's father (*Oedipus*) or son (*Bacchae*), but rather that the universal aspect of it might bring one down: excessive pride, rashness, etc. also sometimes occur in me.

For Aristotle, and Greek philosophy in general, the human will is dominated by tyrannical emotions that impel us to immoral behavior. The most dangerous to society are the excessive desires for wealth and power. These dangerous forces are opposed by cultural institutions such as the law, religion and literary education. Like Plato, Aristotle thought that many of the dramatic productions of his day tended to excite these dangerous desires rather than temper them. Thus, literary criticism is needed to direct poets toward creating works that fulfill a proper educational and social end: a *katharsis* of pity and fear, and all the other calamitous emotional excesses associated with them.

The *Politics* promises a full definition of *katharsis* in the *Poetics*, but if this were ever set to page, it has been lost. Even so, we can surmise something of Aristotle's meaning, if we expand our vision of dramatic performance by looking at the larger image of poetics in Aristotle's philosophy.

First of all, the *katharsis* of pity and fear cannot mean a relaxation of these intense emotions, since relaxation is a function of entertainment which is clearly contrasted with *katharsis*. In ancient Greek, *katharsis* basically means separating the good from the bad, and this can be understood in two ways. The first sense is „purification“ such as sifting grain or liberating the soul from the body. The second

meaning is „purgation“ in the sense of removing disease from the body or anger from the soul. The question is whether the purpose of a dramatic performance is (1) to purify the experience of pity and fear or (2) purge these emotions.

For centuries, scholars have argued for one side or the other. Instead of reviewing the various arguments, I would like to indicate my answer to the question by calling attention to the states of mind that accompany the most intense, and therefore effective, cathartic experiences: astonishment (*ekplêktikos*; *Poetics* 1460b27) and wonder (*thaumazios*, *Poetics* 1452a4). This should occur at the climactic moment and follow naturally from the construction of the plot and the motivation of the characters, for example, when Oedipus asks Jocasta about the circumstances of her first husband's murder and each successive answer nudges the finger of blame round in his own direction.

However, the more usual case is through the introduction of absurdities. Aristotle permits this violation of the orderly construction of dramatic plots because astonishment and wonder are so important in achieving the proper effect on the audience. Nevertheless, the absurdity should have some plausibility, if not to the rational, then at least, the irrational mind. The example he gives is the case when a murderer is himself killed when a statue of his victim falls on him at a public festival. Aristotle does not believe in ghosts, but he is stunned by the apparent fatefulness of the event, which, by the way, actually happened.

The meaning of astonishment is to be driven out of one's senses and normal expectations, and we cannot hear the word „wonder“ without being reminded that Plato says that this is the fundamental emotion of a philosopher (*Theatetus* 155d) and Aristotle says it is the origin of all philosophy (*Metaphysics* 982b12). And, we should keep in mind that this feeling is not essentially pleasurable. Elsewhere in the *Theatetus*, Plato compares the basic emotion of a philosopher to suddenly stumbling into a well while observing the stars. This is the famous anecdote about Thales, who, when climbing out of the well, was greeted by the laughter of a water maiden. She called the philosopher foolish for star-gazing while failing to take note of what was just by his feet. For Plato, the excitement and estrangement of wonder was reserved for a few who were privileged enough to receive an elite dialectical education from a master such as Socrates. On the other hand, Aristotle favored universal and equal education; thus the importance of rightly constructed dramatic performances in his educational curriculum.

Whether *katharsis* means a purified experience of the horrors of human existence or a purgation of the ill-effects of such experiences (pity, fear and anger), the importance of astonishment and wonder argue that *katharsis* is essentially a separation from the ordinary state of affairs: transcendence. Though entertainment and exemplary moral actions are important elements of theater, the ultimate aim of dramatic performance is to move the audience to a new, and presumably higher, level of consciousness.

### Zeami's Goal: *Hana* (Flower)

Like Aristotle, the importance of Zeami Motokiyo (1363-1443) cannot be overestimated. A number of remarkable parallels can be found between the two men. Both were plucked out of somewhat humble circumstances and thrust into the center of high culture, where they established the norms of excellence for later generations. Both fell out of favor with the political authorities toward the end of their careers and their teachings were kept secret for hundreds of years.<sup>1</sup> The importance of this latter point is that these texts were intended for initiates; therefore, important presuppositions remain unsaid in the texts. As mentioned above, Aristotle's *Poetics* must be read within the context of the overall goals of his systematic scientific writings. As for Zeami, the key point to recognize is his transformation of rustic, Shintou rituals into a method of Buddhist practice that he hoped would rival and even outstrip other aesthetic expressions of Buddhism that developed in Medieval Japan such as *waka* (Japanese poetry in general, but specifically something like the Western ode) and *renga* (linked verses composed by pairs or groups, often in competitions).

It is sometimes pointed out that Zeami, who both wrote and performed Noh dramas, should be compared with Aeschylus (525-456 BC), who transformed the rustic drama of his predecessors into the elegant tragedies of the Golden Age of Greek drama. While it should be kept in mind that Aristotle wrote dramatic dialogues, the difference between him and Zeami in relation to the actual world of dramatic performance is important. By the time Aristotle was writing the *Poetics* (c.350 BC), Athens had fallen on hard times; two oligarchic coup d'états (411/410 BC and 404/403 BC) and defeat at the hands of its traditional rival Sparta (404 BC) had reduced the city to a shadow of its former self. In the schools, the philosophers accused the dramatists of corrupting the society, while in the theaters, the philosophers were mocked by the poets. This was a serious conflict. In 399 BC, the poet Meletus accused Socrates of impiety and corrupting the youth which led to his execution.

Though more favorable to the dramatic arts than Plato, Aristotle's literary criticism is ultimately aimed at a censorship of dramatic performance. On the other

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<sup>1</sup> „...by the seventeenth century, in the early Tokugawa period, the development of printing...gave rise to the publication of certain play texts and a much bowdlerized version of portions of *Teaching on Style and the Flower*. The authentic texts of Zeami, however, were kept in private hands until 1908, when a collection of the genuine treatises was discovered in a Tokyo secondhand bookstore...they were edited by the writer Yoshida Tougo and were published in 1909 under the auspices of the society for the Study of Noh Literature. These texts were collated with other versions that came to light, and the first set of definitive texts were published in the 1940s by a leading scholar of noh, Nose Asaji, in his two-volume *Zeami Furoku Bushii* (The Sixteen treatises of Zeami).“ Rimer, J. Thomas and Yamazaki Masakazu, *On the Art of the Noh Drama: The Major Treatises of Zeami*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. xx-xxi.

hand, Zeami's goal is to elevate the importance of Noh. This requires both aesthetic perfection and political astuteness. In order to gain favor, an actor should avoid too closely imitating vulgar manners lest it offend the aristocrats in the audience.<sup>2</sup> He even counsels that an actor give a bad performance rather than keep an aristocrat waiting while the actor summons up his „stage presence.“ „He must have no other aim but to give delight to the noblemen.“<sup>3</sup>

In the writings of Zeami, a lot of emphasis is put on characterization. For example, when playing an old man, he advises the actor to drag his feet half a beat behind the chorus to show infirmity.<sup>4</sup> Acceptable roles (*monomane*) are clearly prescribed as well as the ages technical training in these roles should occur. Specific attention is given to singing, body and foot movement, and a kind of „method acting“ in which the actor becomes what he imitates.

If this emphasis on and delimitation of characterization were all that Zeami were about, the differences from Aristotle would outweigh the similarities and it would seem impossible to draw any lines of connection between them. Just as with Aristotle's apparent focus on plot, Zeami's emphasis on character must be seen in a broader context. He sometimes writes, with increasing frequency in later works such as „The Mirror Held to the Flower“ and „Disciplines for Joy,“ that mere technical excellence falls short of real „achievement“ (*kashuu*). He contrasts "internalization" (*yushufu*) of a role with "externalization" (*mushufu*), and says that the latter, no matter the degree of technical excellence, never amounts to a true performance. The latter is imitation; the former is a matter of „becoming“ the role. Though training is a necessary condition, it is not sufficient. An inner power of spirit or mind must enliven the performance and this is called „flower“ (*hana*): „Hana is spirit, and the seed is technique.“<sup>5</sup>

„What gives the actor the seeds for endless flowering in every aspect of his art is that interior spiritual power that lies within him. ...a truly gifted actor carries out his interior artistic intentions in myriad ways through his artistic performances, and may truly be called a „man of capacity,“ the vessel of our art. ...The world of nature is the vessel that gives birth to all things, ...an actor must become one in spirit with the vessel of nature and achieve in the depths of the art of the Noh an ease of spirit that can be compared to the boundlessness of that nature itself,

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<sup>2</sup> Zeami, *Fushikaden* (Teachings on Style and the Flower), Ch. 2, „*Monomane*,“ trans. Sakurai Chuichi, Hayashi Shuuseki, Sato Rokuro and Miyai Bin, (Kyoto: Sumiya-Shinobe Publishing, 1968).

<sup>3</sup> Zeami, *Fushikaden*, Ch. 3, „Questions and Answers,“ p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Zeami, *Fushikaden*, Ch. 7, „Further Secret Instructions,“ pp. 86-87.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 84.

thus to achieve at last the Art of the Flower of Peerless Charm (*myousho*).<sup>6</sup>

Zeami often speaks of the importance of „freshness (*mezurashiki*)“ as a measure of the excellence of a performance. A play must suit the occasion, but not perfectly: a daytime performance must have something of the foreboding of the night. Above all, the actor should not fall into routine patterns of dance. Even if a performance is successful, something different should be ventured the next time the play is put on. The key elements are novelty and counterpoint. The dance of a devil must be violent and terrifying, but it must also include some elements of grace and charm.<sup>7</sup> In „Finding Gems, Gaining Flower,“ he says that an actor playing the role of an old person should aim at "Relaxed Heart Looking Afar," a woman's role is "Concentration of Mind and Relinquishing Physical Strength," and as for a warrior, "Physical Strength, Splintered Heart" is called for.<sup>8</sup> The Japanese architect Kurokawa Kisho calls this harmony of opposites the true expression of the Japanese aesthetic value of *wabi* and Zeami's *hana* is the highest expression of this value.

Despite the emphasis on internalization, a performance after all is for an audience. It is important that this spirit of *hana* be communicated to the audience, so that both actors and audience are elevated to an experience of transcendent spiritual purification. According to Kamparu Kunio, this transmission of *hana* is called „*yugen*“ (grace).<sup>9</sup>

„If we contrast these two inseparable concepts we will have both *hana*: exterior symbolic beauty, beauty seen, and *yugen*: subconscious beauty, beauty felt and responded to, and there can be seen a change of consciousness from beauty that one is made to see to beauty that one is made to feel.“<sup>10</sup>

Technical excellence may thrill the audience, but when the actor truly „becomes“ the ghost of a warrior or a mad woman, the audience is gripped by the performance,

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<sup>6</sup> Zeami, *Yuugaku Shuudou Fuuken* (Disciplines for Joy), in Rimer, J. Thomas and Yamazaki Masakazu, *On the Art of the Noh Drama: The Major Treatises of Zeami*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 119.

<sup>7</sup> Zeami, *Fushikaden*, Ch. 2, „*Monomane*,“

<sup>8</sup> Zeami, *Shugyokutokka* (Finding Gems and Gaining the Flower,“ in Rimer, *op cit.*, p. 141.

<sup>9</sup> In *Fushikaden*, *yugen* describes the *hana* of „mad young woman“ roles, but it seems to come to express the achievement of *hana par excellence*.

<sup>10</sup> Kamparu Kunio, *The Noh Theater*, (New York: Weatherhill, 1983), p. 12. Kamparu remarks that *yugen* originally applied to all characters, but as time went by, Zeami applied it only to the elegance of court ladies.

seized by the opportunity to transcend present limitations.

Zeami calls this moment of transcendence „fascination“ (*omoshiroki*) and explains it in "Finding Gems, Gaining Flower," as similar to the moment the sun goddess Amaterasu-o-mikami rolled back the stone from the entry to the cave in which she had secreted herself.<sup>11</sup> The sun goddess, angry at the disruptions of the storm god, Susa-no-wo, had left the world, and with her leaving, the world fell into darkness, decay and death. The other deities despairing of this wasteland, gathered round, pleading for her return. Ama-no-Uzume did a whirling, erotic dance and so brought light-heartedness to the deities, and out of curiosity, the goddess of light returned to the world to see what had captured everyone's attention. Zeami compares the appearance of Amaterasu-o-mikami to *hana* and the bright faces of the spectators *omoshiroki*, which he says originally means „fair-face.“

One wonders how the deities could have been delighted by the dance in the primordial darkness of the sun goddess' absence. It is possible because the darkness represents the unconscious apprehension of *myousho* as pure joy in dance itself, in whirling things, „that from the first, not a thing is.“<sup>12</sup>

In *Notes on the Nine Levels* (*Kyui*), Zeami speaks of *myousho* by citing a Zen Buddhist saying:

„In Silla, in the dead of night, the sun shines brightly“ and comments, „The meaning of the phrase Peerless Charm surpasses any explanation in words and lies beyond the workings of consciousness.“<sup>13</sup>

An absurd expression: the sun shines at night, told in words that deny the possibility of telling such things. But, is it any more or less absurd than the Noh dance itself, the graceful body hidden within the bulky costume, mask and wig that allow only glimpses of the neck, chin, hands and feet.

Both Zeami and Aristotle can be taken to focus on elements of the drama itself: characterization for the former and scripting the plot of the latter, but this would be a superficial reading of their intentions. For both, dramatic performance is essentially a matter of transcendence, and this mainly concerns the emotional life of the audience. However, there is an important difference which describes so many differences between the Western and Eastern cultural traditions. While Aristotle admits the introduction of absurdities into the plot if they serve to increase the cathartic effect, overall these are to

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<sup>11</sup> Zeami, „Finding Gems and Gaining the Flower,“ in Rimer, *op cit.*, pp. 132-33.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 134.

<sup>13</sup> Zeami. *Kyui* (*Notes on the Nine Levels*), in Rimer, *op. cit.*, p. 120.



be avoided. It is much better if the logic of the plot leads to the crisis of the drama. The teaching of the play will be all the more clear if the contradictions within the character are drawn with legible lines. The horror of the event will have reasons comprehensible to all. It is Oedipus' pride and anger that subvert his well-intentioned efforts to avoid his prophesied fate. Aristotle aims at shaping drama through literary criticism into philosophic, i.e. analytic, deliberation.

On the other hand, Zeami's vision of transcendence is more ambiguous and obscure. To be sure, the metaphor of the highest excellence is the „sun shining at night,“ but this Buddhist saying does not mean that the sun annihilates the night. It equally calls attention to to obscurity and ambiguity; there could be no consciousness of light if the unconscious were not itself primordial darkness. This is expressed by the Chinese character „ma“ (間), which depicts the sun (or perhaps the moon) shining through a gate. The term is usually translated by the English word „interval,“ and like the English word it has both spatial and temporal connotations. The difference is that „ma“ not only means space or time but also, space-time together.<sup>14</sup>

To understand how space and time are fused in Noh performance consider the long bridgeway between the dressing room and the stage proper in a Noh theater. In a Western theater, the actor is either offstage (behind the curtains) or onstage; the passage from one to the other occurs in an instant. While it is true that a Noh actor passes through a curtain to the bridgeway, it cannot be said that he is yet onstage. An atmosphere of anticipation is established by the procession to the stage through a typical *jyo-ha-kyu* movement, wherein a slow, steady progression (*jyo*) is counterpointed by a fast movement (*ha*) and finally counter-balanced by an acceleration (*kyu*).<sup>15</sup> When this pattern of progression-speed-acceleration is performed for exits, a feeling of exhilaration is produced. The point is that for quite a long interval (both spatial and temporal) the actor is neither here nor there. We see the performer but not yet the performance; the bridgeway entrance is a kind of yogic breathing exercise, an exhalation and inhalation of atmosphere within which the performance will take place. It is not a matter of moving 5 meters in 7 minutes in the visible world; rather, the „moment“ of entrance is stretched out in order to produce a fantastic space of demons, ghosts and madness. It is an interval of space-time before objective, measurable space and time. In this way, the disadvantage of being first seen as an actor in costume entering the stage, that is, as a physical being of ordinary perception, is turned to advantage.

This seeing yet not seeing is reminiscent of Tanizaki Junichiro's comment on the

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<sup>14</sup> cf. Kamparu Kunio, *The Noh Theater*, pp. 70-74. „Noh is sometimes called the art of *ma*.“

<sup>15</sup> To the untrained eye, *jyo-ha-kyu* can appear as simply acceleration from slow to fast.

tokunoma of the great temples of Kyoto and Nara which are so dark that one can scarcely see the hanging scrolls within the shadows. „Yet the combination of that blurred old painting and the dark tokunoma is one of absolute harmony.“<sup>16</sup> For Japanese aesthetics, harmony lies in discord and balance in asymmetry. The goal is to avoid monotony. If astonishment and wonder require contradiction, then so be it. In fact, this is the Buddhist understanding of being: reality is transient and ephemeral, continuous presence is illusion. The philosophic mind (*myousho*) released by Noh performance is delight in absurdity and patience with obscurity.

### **Hijikata's Aim: *Ankoku* (darkness)**

Ankoku Butoh (Dance of Utter Darkness) is clearly an assault on both Western and Japanese classical traditions. It would be easier to make a comparison between ancient Greek drama and Noh, on the one hand, and Butoh, on the other, by following the softer line of Ohno Kazuo or San Kai Juku, but I would like to explore this relationship at its most extreme through the dance of Hijikata Tatsumi (1928-1986).

Hijikata targets order and refinement with the arrows of absurdity and anarchy.

„[Dance] must be absurd. It is a mirror which thaws fear....In other forms of dance, such as flamenco or classical dance, the movements are derived from a fixed technique; they are imposed from the outside and are conventional in form. In my case, it's the contrary; my dance is far removed from conventions and techniques...it is the unveiling of my inner life.“<sup>17</sup>

Absurdity is the opposite of reason (and justice). Dance cannot rely on fixed techniques, because these are conveyed by rational explanations; to be told to move in „such and such“ a way is to submit the body to the commands of the mind and the designs of the eye. One must learn how to move from the body, which does not speak and does not see. The inspiration of dance comes from the silence and darkness of the body.

Hijikata says that the way to understand light is through darkness:

„I prefer the dark to the dazzling light. Darkness is the best symbol for light. There is no way that one can understand the nature of light if one never observes

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<sup>16</sup> Tanizaki Junichiro, *In Praise of Shadows*, trans. by Thomas J. Harper and Edward G. Seidensticker, (London: Vintage, 20001) pp. 31-32.

<sup>17</sup> Hijikata Tatsumi, „Interview,“ in *Butoh: Shades of Darkness*, text by Jean Viala, ed. by Nourit Masson-Sekine, (Tokyo: Shufunotomo, 1988), p. 185.

deeply the darkness."<sup>18</sup>

He goes on to say that the opposite is true, darkness can only be understood from the point of view of light. The essence of reason is the distinction of opposites, the law of non-contradiction. To find light in darkness and darkness in light is absurd. In the *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche says that the loss of the law of non-contradiction and its corollary, the principle of sufficient reason (that everything has a rational explanation) places us on the precipice of an abyss—the loss of a sense of self-identity.

It should be pointed out that Noh drama does not only express absurdity and obscurity through contradictory aesthetic and rational elements. These elements are also summoned up from the depths of the actor's body. The body stance of a Noh actor is inclined forward. When well-executed the actor should always be on the verge of losing his balance and tumbling into the abyss. This is accentuated by the fact that the mask does not permit the actor to see the edge of the stage. The actor can only see the tops of the two pillars at the front corners of the stage and the top of the pine tree painted on the back wall of the stage.<sup>19</sup> There is also a kind of sonar guidance system provided by the large and small drum at the back of the stage. With only these few markers, it is quite easy to lose track of one's position on the stage and tumble off the edge. Given their precarious position, it is quite remarkable to see a Noh actor gliding with grace and charm across the stage.

Nevertheless, with a nearly 600 year pedigree, the greatest danger facing the Noh drama is losing its edge, its „freshness“ in Zeami's words. Commenting on the work of Hijikata, Suzuki Tadashi, founder of Waseda *Shougekijou* (Waseda Small Theater Group), said,

„...when I see Noh and such, I no longer feel that fictional perfection exists based on a sense of crisis or in that sense of terror that if you take even one wrong step your will fall backwards into a terrible abyss. To all appearances things still are like that, but in fact they are quite stable. My first impression of Mr. Hijikata's work was that sense of crisis.“<sup>20</sup>

Suzuki finds a sense of crisis in the work of Hijikata that seems to be lacking in

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<sup>18</sup> Hijikata Tatsumi, *op.cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>19</sup> This is complicated by the fact that contemporary Noh actors are approximately 10 cm. taller than those of the past. Consequently in older theaters their line of site might be above the top of the pine tree image.

<sup>20</sup> Suzuki, Tadashi. „Interview with Hijikata Tatsumi,“ in „Hijikata Tatsumi: The Words of Butoh,“ *The Drama Review*, Vol. 44, No. 1, ed. by Kurihara Nanako, Spring 2000, p. 62.

contemporary performance. „Crisis“ derives from the Greek word „*krinein*“ which means to separate, decide or judge. It is used by Hippocrates to signify „the turning point of the disease.“ It is the point at which the body will lift itself up to health or fall into the abyss of death. In ancient Greek medicine, this decision is achieved through „sifting“ or „separating out“ tainted elements or humors from pure ones. The „crisis“ is the moment at which an act of purification/purgation succeeds or fails. It is *katharsis*.

Another word that derives from „*krinein*“ is criticism. The question arises whether literary and dramatic criticism increase the sense of crisis or level it into well-worn pathways. Clearly, Aristotle and Zeami want something critical to happen to the audience in the former sense, even though they favor censorship and obedience. Nevertheless, their use of such critical faculties has a subversive intention or goal: to make the public voice democratic (Aristotle) and the elite feel the tragedy of the human condition (Zeami). On the point of absurdity (*thaumazios*, *myoushu* and *ankoku*), Aristotle, Zeami and Hijikata are not so far apart. As for the abyss that absurdity opens up, Hijikata's sense of anarchy is a challenge to traditional ideals of order and refinement.

The Greek word „*arche*“ means the origin from which all comes, the foundation upon which all stands. *Arche* is translated into Latin as „*principia*,“ from which we get the English word „principle.“ Anarchy is the negation of the origin and foundation. *Arche* also means „*archon*,“ „*princeps*“ and „prince,“ the one who leads, chooses the way and judges the progress. Thus, anarchy also means the denial of the judgment, the criteria: the rejection of criticism in general.

„Butoh has the best capacity for expression in the world...This is because the Japanese have a fundamentally anarchic concept of the body....We immediately feel that the body is bound up with something strange.“<sup>21</sup>

When Hijikata moved from classical/modern dance to Butoh in the performance of *Kinjiki* (1959, *Forbidden Colors*), he stunned and outraged the public<sup>22</sup> and was expelled from the dance association to which he belonged at the time. Based on a work by Mishima Yukio, the performance broke taboos about homosexuality and ended with Ohno Yoshito (Ohno Kazuo's son) smothering a live chicken. This was clearly a transgression of classical notions of dignity and refinement. Yet, transgression is not only to be found in anarchic performances by avant garde artists such as Hijikata; it lies

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<sup>21</sup> Hijikata Tatsumi, „Interview,“ in *Butoh: Shades of Darkness*, p. 184.

<sup>22</sup> About a third of the audience fled the theater during the first 18 minutes of the performance. Yakushiji, Sayaka. *Daily Yomiuri*, Nov.6, 1998.

repressed in the night of every human soul and expresses itself in our dreams where reason and egoistic self-preservation are overthrown by the free play of appetites, desires and a will to create a dramatic world.

Lying sleepless on a night of unrequited love, Ono no Komachi once wrote,

When my desire	<i>Ito semete</i>
grows too fierce	<i>Koishiki toki wa</i>
I wear my bed clothes	<i>Ubatama no</i>
inside out,	<i>Yoko no koromo o</i>
dark as the night's rough husk. <sup>23</sup>	<i>kaeshite zo kiru.</i>

At the time, it was thought that wearing bed clothes inside out would cause one to dream of one's lover. In many poems, Komachi seems to meet her lover only in dreams and sometimes she wishes she could live out the rest of her life in dreams. The reversal of the normal order for wearing bed clothes is not merely an absurd gesture. It is not just a matter of coming up to the edge of the precipice and staring into the abyss. To will oneself into an endless dream world is to jump off the precipice into the abyss of the unconscious mind.

For Hijikata, the absent lover is the pure spirit of dance, something he believes has been destroyed by criticism and the establishment of canonical orders. For him, in order to prove that one is genuinely interested in facing the moment of crisis, staring into the abyss, one must sometimes jump into it.

„I have always danced in a manner where I grope within myself for the roots of suffering by tearing at the superficial harmony.“<sup>24</sup>

The question is that having jumped is there any way to find one's way back to solid ground? Having transgressed the limits of classical performance is there any certain way for the actors to find their ways back to the stage and the audience back to their seats, so that they can make their ways back to the world of ordinary human affairs? Can we even equate a surrealistic exploration of the unconscious with a transcendence of mundane reality?

The word for stage in Greek is „skene,“ the scene. This is not only the frame of the spectacle but also the framework of the dream story: the plot. As mentioned above,

<sup>23</sup> Ono no Komachi, in *The Ink Dark Moon*, trans. by Jane Hirshfield and Mariko Aratani, (New York, Vintage, 1990), p. 4. In the notes, the translators explain that the English is somewhat more forceful than the Japanese, but this is necessary to translate the passion behind the Japanese poem.

<sup>24</sup> Hijikata Tatsumi, „Interview,“ *op. cit.*, p. 185.

Aristotle spends a lot of time making sure that the story maintains order even when it explores the horrors of genocide (*Hecuba*, *Trojan Women*), patricide (*Oresteia*, *Electra*) or infanticide (*Iphigenia at Aulis*, *Bacchae*). Even Zeami says, „To be able to write a new scenario for a Noh is the very essence of this art.“<sup>25</sup> He adds that even if one is not educated, one can go a long way by mentioning the names of famous places and above all keep the story simple and comprehensible. For ages, the framework of plot, character and symbol have kept the trajectory of dramatic experience on course: an interval of transcendence, but always a safe and sound landing in familiar surroundings, hopefully with a heightened awareness of human suffering and the dangers of excessive passion—but nothing too dangerous, too transgressive. No matter how much we lose ourselves in the drama, we always know it is only a story: it is red paint not real blood, it is the song of an actor not a howl from the grave.

Even if the plots are too familiar and it is more a matter of how we will get to the end of the story rather than what will happen in the story, can this justify avicide? Surely the intention, goal and aim is to produce a shriek of horror in the soul of the audience, not literally send them screaming for the exits. Besides, so much avant garde theater is just plain squirming in your seat boring.

I would like to suggest that another source of order is available to dramatic performance: music. If not the milestones of a storyline, then let music provide some measured intervals. Further, there is no greater incitement to ecstasy in the common human soul than music. It is the pure image of time and the energy of bodily movement. It makes the mind soar and the foot dance. In classical Greek drama and Noh, the musical framework is provided by the chorus. However, since the interval for this paper has come to an end, I will leave my discussion of the chorus for another time.

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<sup>25</sup> Zeami, *Fushikaden*, Ch. 6 „Kashuu,“ (Achieving the Hana), p. 68.